
This book provides a concise treatment of Hume's “Of Miracles,” defending both an interpretation of Hume's argument and an evaluation of its philosophical significance. The philosophical argumentation is consistently rigorous and the interpretation of Hume is interesting and original.

A distinctive aspect of George's approach, which should have been highlighted in the introduction but was not, is his treatment of “Of Miracles” as a standalone essay. This approach serves to illuminate certain aspects of “Of Miracles,” especially the relationship between the two parts. However, there are places where the lack of discussion of the essay's position in the larger scheme of Hume's *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* weakens the argument.

George argues that Part I of “Of Miracles” is dedicated to proving, on the basis of a general account of the epistemology of testimony, that no testimony could establish the occurrence of a miracle unless the falsehood of that testimony would be more miraculous, while Part II is dedicated to establishing that no purported religiously significant miracle passes this test. After a treatment of Hume's definition of ‘miracle’ in chapter 1, George explains and defends his interpretation of the argument in chapters 2-4. Chapter 5 consider a variety of objections to Hume and chapter 6 gives a philosophical evaluation of the argument in light of Wittgensteinian considerations about the nature of religious belief.

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The organization of chapter 1 is problematic. George begins by assuming that a law of nature must be “a true description of some natural regularity” (1). This understanding of law, when combined with Hume's definition of 'miracle' as 'a violation of the laws of nature,' “rules miracles out of existence by linguistic fiat” (1). Since Hume does not take the non-occurrence of miracles to be trivial, this suggests that Hume did not make this assumption. Nevertheless, in section 1.1, George takes this view about laws as a fixed background against which “Of Miracles” must be interpreted and concludes that Hume must not have meant that a miracle is a violation of a law but only that a miracle “violates a well-confirmed law-like statement” (5-6).

In section 1.2, George argues that Hume did not after all hold the assumption about laws attributed to him in section 1.1. (This should have been indicated at the outset.) George argues that what Hume means by 'law of nature' is (roughly) what we mean by 'well-confirmed law-like statement,' so that Hume's definition of 'miracle' can be taken literally after all.

George's epistemic interpretation of Hume on laws is interesting and is supported by evidence from “Of Miracles.” However, this is the place where the broader context of the *Enquiry* and *Treatise* is most conspicuously lacking. In particular, there is no attention to the projectivist aspect of Hume's thought, which would have been illuminating here and certainly needs to be dealt with more explicitly if George's interpretation is to be convincing.

Among the objections to Hume's argument George considers, the most philosophically interesting is also the most historically problematic. George discusses a remark attributed to Samuel Johnson by Boswell regarding Hume's claim about belief in miracles: “Hume, taking the
proposition simply, is right. But the Christian revelation is not proved by miracles alone, but as connected … with the doctrines in confirmation of which the miracle is wrought” (68). Building on this remark, George argues that Hume ought to have recognized a line of response to his argument which would say that just as (on Hume's own view) it is reasonable to continue the practice of induction even though we cannot justify this to anyone not already engaged in the practice, so also it is reasonable to continue in Christian belief (including belief in miracles) although this cannot be justified to an outsider. This is an interesting philosophical point and leads nicely into the discussion of Wittgenstein in the final chapter, but George's desire to make this philosophical point drives him to distort the history by attributing this point of view not only to fideists like Pascal and James but also to staunch evidentialists like Locke and Paley. Historically speaking, this remark would be better understood in light of the common view that the purpose of miracles is to justify revealed theology to someone who is already convinced of natural theology. With natural theology already in hand, one can have views about what kinds of doctrines are more or less likely to be revealed by God and these views can be taken into account in evaluating a purported miracle. In both chapters 5 and 6, Locke's The Reasonableness of Christianity could usefully have served to give much needed historical context to the discussion.

Despite these shortcomings, this book provides will be of interest to Hume scholars and to philosophers examining miracles, religious belief, and the epistemology of testimony.

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